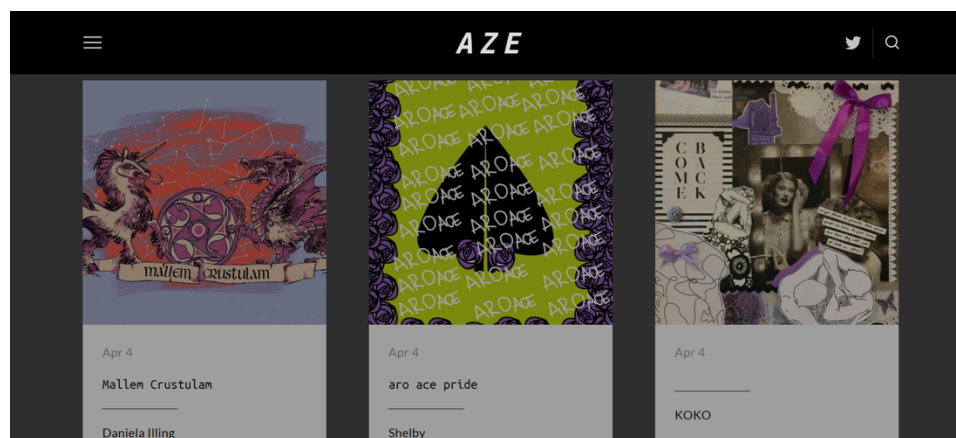




Asexual Latina/o/x Representation in *AZE*

Review by Janeth Montenegro Marquez

AZE Journal. 2016 – 2022. <https://azejournal.com/>.



The image above is a screenshot of the first page you encounter when you enter the *AZE* journal webpage. In the upper left-hand corner are three lines that will lead you to other areas of the website. In the upper right-hand corner, there is the small bird logo for Twitter and then a small magnifying glass (the search option). There are three main images present on the screenshot of the page, the first from the left, is a rectangle with an image of a unicorn-type creature and a dragon on a lavender background overlaid with a pinkish-orange splotch covered in constellations. The dragon and unicorn are holding between them a disk decorated with suits of playing cards and underneath there is a banner with the words “Mallem crustulam.” The title of the article is the same as that in the script and the author’s name, Daniela Illing, is right underneath. The middle image has a neon green background with a border of purple roses around it. At the center there is a black ace suit with two purple roses at its stem. Superimposed over the image are the words “AROACE” in all caps in white, repeated. Underneath that is the title, “aro ace pride” and the author’s name, Shelby. The third and last image is a collage of vintage looking images, with a white woman reflected in a mirror in the center. There is a drawing of a person to the left of the woman and a sign that says, “come back.” On the bottom right of this square there is a drawing of two people, arms linked. On the top right-hand corner there is an image of a hot pink ribbon over a white doily. Underneath the collage is the date, which says April 4 (the date for all the images presented) and underneath is the name of the author, which is KOKO.

AZE is an online journal created by Michael Paramo, a Xicanx writer and artist, devoted to publishing works from asexual, aromantic, and agender authors. The journal serves as one of the few places where individuals from these communities can speak about their experiences, whether that be exploring how race and gender influence how one is viewed or exclaiming to the world via artworks why being asexual, aromantic, and/or agender is okay. Paramo created this journal to give other queer individuals, queer BIPOC individuals especially, a space of community to explore their identities. The journal began in 2016 as *The Asexual*, then became *AZE* to be more inclusive of ace, aro, and agender people. The online journal is divided into



different volumes, each with a separate issue about different themes or topics. Current themes include “Asexual Masculinities,” “Redefining Relationships,” and “Aromanticism.” The volumes, issues, and individual articles themselves each have a piece of artwork attached to them that may or may not be explicitly connected to the topic of the works posted. The journal offers works under five categories, the first being “US” where the creators of the journal write about their own experiences. There is also a section for art where individuals can submit their artwork in addition to sections for poetry and articles. The last section includes academic works where you can find reviews and essays relating to asexuality, aromanticism, or other related topics. The artwork attached to each article and the dark background of the website give the journal an air of inviting mystery, with each title beckoning readers to learn more.

The existence of a journal catering to asexual, aromantic, and agender experiences is important because these are topics that are still not widely known or talked about in society. There are few places where individuals can create aroace and agender content specifically, even fewer spaces that focus on all three. The emphasis on including topics ranging from body image, representation, sexuality, relationships, race, attraction, and their intersections, cements the journal as a space where people can write about experiences and theories that they might not be able to in other queer spaces. Ace, aro, and agender intersections with race and ethnicity are especially important to the journal because BIPOC ace, aro, and agender representation is often absent from the mainstream. Angela Chen, in *Ace: What Asexuality Reveals About Desire, Society, and the Meaning of Sex*, reiterates Ianna Hawkins Owen’s point that asexuality is tied to whiteness because white people are seen as having a pure sexuality while Black and Latinx people are seen as hypersexual (2020, 71). Owen first made this point in the chapter “On the Racialization of Asexuality,” which goes over the history of the interconnectedness asexuality has with race, and specifically, about perceptions of Black and white women’s sexualities (Owen 2014). Reading about experiences of other people like yourself who identify as aromantic or asexual, can help BIPOC people, including Latinx people who are especially underrepresented in ace and aro content, feel less alone in their identities. *AZE* journal creates a virtual space that functions as an avenue for asexual, aromantic, and agender people of color to voice their thoughts about their intersecting identities.

The online journal includes a variety of works from people of multiple backgrounds, but it is its inclusion of works in languages other than English, in this case Spanish and by Latinx peoples of various backgrounds, that makes this *AZE* especially unique in my reading. One such article is Anna María Mengani’s essay “Pride and Prejudice” (2018). In this essay, Mengani talks about what it means to be sexualized at such a young age, the weight of compulsory sexuality as it is applied to Latinas via stereotypes, and how being asexual combines to make maneuvering life difficult. Asexual Asian American and Black authors have spoken up about the complicated ways their racialized identities converse with asexuality since stereotypes exist that at times desexualize them and at other times hypersexualize them. Black women’s desexualization occurs through the stereotype of the mammy and their hypersexualization through the stereotype of the jezebel (Owens 2014, 257). Similarly, Asian women are frequently hyper- and desexualized through either being seen as submissive and as sexually available to white men (Chen 2020, 72). In much the same way, Latina/o/x people are also sexualized and face amatonormative cultural expectations regarding relationships and lifestyles from both their own cultures and the dominant white one. Latinas in popular culture oftentimes carry with them the stereotype of being “fiery” both in character and sexually, therefore insinuating



that their bodies are up for consumption in that way. Mengani states that after hearing how much people sexualize her identity and her body, she began to ignore how she felt and ended up in a relationship with someone because she felt the expectation to do so (2018, 34). There is an aspect of compulsory sexuality in the stereotypes associated with Latinas that is particularly insidious because of a host of cultural expectations stemming from popular portrayals of Latina/o/x people. Mengani herself gives examples of these in her essay when she quotes things her classmates have said to her— things such as “You must sleep around a lot because you have the body for it,” “your hips don't lie,” and “I wish I had your boobs; I would hook up with all the guys”—both comments sexualize Mengani without her consent (2018, 33). Although these comments are not unique to the experience of Latina/o/x folks, Mengani's essay demonstrates how for her, being Latina was a big part of why people would not take her asexuality seriously.

Mengani's work is her own and her experience is her own. Not all Latinx people have the body type typically associated with the “spicy Latina” stereotype and not everyone will experience the stereotype in the same way. This perception usually makes Latinas out to be intense in all aspects of their character, from how they communicate to their sexuality. *AZE* does a good job of creating a niche for individuals who crave it, and it includes authors and artists from diverse backgrounds who help create a diverse set of stories and theories that provide multiple points of view around asexuality, aromanticism, agendered embodiment, and other queer and trans identities.

Works Cited

- Chen, Angela. 2020. *Ace: What Asexuality Reveals About Desire, Society, and the Meaning of Sex*. Boston: Beacon Press Books.
- Owen, Ianna Hawkins. 2014. “On the Racialization of Asexuality.” In *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives*, edited by KJ Cerankowski and M. Milks, 251 – 283. New York: Routledge.

JANETH MONTENEGRO MARQUEZ (she/they) is a partially Mexican and partially American, Latina/x Anthropology graduate student from California studying in Illinois. Her areas of focus are undocumented Latina/o/x and Asian American relations, the Immigrant Right's movement, immigration reform, and feminist theory. They enjoy learning about queer topics, reading when they can, and hoarding books like there is no tomorrow. You can find her on **Instagram** at @neathie_moon.